‘HOW I HAVE EVER LOVED THE LIFE REMOVED’:
RE-INTERPRETING THE CONVENTION OF DISGUISE
IN SHAKESPEARE’S MEASURE FOR MEASURE.
„JAK KIEDYKOLWIEK KOCHAŁEM ODEBRANE MI ŽYCIE”:
RE-INTERPRETACJA KONWENCJI KAMUFLAŻU
W SZEKSPIROWEJ MIARKA ZA MIARKĄ.

Abstract: The paper focuses on the design of Duke Vincentio from Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure, interpreted as a highly ambiguous example of the traditional ‘ruler in disguise,’ set within New Historicism’s methodological framework and the theory of Renaissance self-fashioning proposed by Stephen Greenblatt. Although not a treatise on disguise theory, Greenblatt’s Renaissance Self-Fashioning (1980) develops analyses appearing highly relevant to the study of disguise in the early modern social and literary context. This is due to the key significance of disguise in his reading of Renaissance culture, typified by, argues Greenblatt, the predominance of rhetoric and ever-present theatricality. Applying Greenblatt’s analyses to Shakespeare’s Duke, I will show how self-fashioning governs the character’s self-identity, resulting in an emergence of behaviours into the character’s discourse, indicating a great psychological conflict.

Keywords: Shakespeare, disguise, New Historicism, self-fashioning, early modern subjectivity, role-playing.

Streszczenie: Artykuł skupia się na kreacji postaci księcia Vincentio z Miarka za Miarkę Szekspiira, interpretowanej jako wysoce niejednoznaczny przykład tradycyjnego „władcy w przebraniu” oraz osadzonej w ramach metodologicznych Nowego Historyzmu i teorii renesansowej automody zaproponowanej przez Stephena Greenblatta. Chociaż nie jest to traktat o teorii kamuflarzu, Greenblatt w Renaissance Self-fashioning (1980) zawarł analizy, które wydają się bardzo
istotne dla badania kamuflażu we wczesnonowożytnym kontekście społecznym i literackim. Wynika to z kluczowego znaczenia kamuflarzu w jego interpretacji kultury renesansowej, charakteryzującej się, jak argumentuje Greenblatt, przewagą retoryki i wszechobecną teatralnością. Wykorzystując badania Greenblatta do analizy Duke’a Szekspira, wskażę, jak automoda rządzi tożsamością bohatera, co skutkuje pojawieniem się zachowań w dyskursie bohatera, wskazujących na wielki konflikt psychologiczny.

Słowa kluczowe: Szekspir, kamuflarz, Nowy Historyzm, samokształtownie,

Wczesnonowożytna podmiotowość, odgrywanie ról.

Introduction

As Kevin Quarmby notes, the disguised ruler motif began to appear on the Elizabethan stage from the 1580s. These incognito rulers initially offered light-hearted entertainment, portraying a “royal ‘comical history,’” exemplified in plays such as Fair Em, the Miller’s Daughter of Manchester. By the end of the 1590s, these ‘comical’ disguise episodes of the ruler became:

subtly conflated with ‘Chronicle History’ fact-based narratives from the Tudor Chronicles, resulting in a far darker expression of disguised ruler intent. Royal subterfuge was now tainted by a less sympathetic expression of social unease.

By the time of James I’s accession, Quarmby believes the disguised ruler had become a dangerously voyeuristic political entity, operating within a “climate of surveillance.” Such rulers were evident, he adds, in Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure which he believes is commonly dated to this accession. Quarmby, like other critics before him such as Jonathan Dollimore and Leonard Tennenhouse, speculates that the subversive presence of Shakespeare’s Duke Vincentio may have served as a commentary on the accession: “The tantalizing reference to a performance of Measure for Measure in James’s reign supports an occasionalist reading of the play, since it could gauge public reaction to unfolding political events.”

2 Ibid. 20-21.
3 Ibid. 2-3.
5 Quarmby, 105.
The design of Duke Vincentio does not, however, reside comfortably within the traditional framework of a disguised ruler or simply as a political voyeur. Instead, we interpret this protagonist as an equivocal ruler in disguise, whose alleged ethical authority hardly conforms with his risky transgressions of princely prerogatives. While investigating this contention, I wish to assess the Duke’s design and his ethical authority through the methodological framework of New Historicism and the seminal theory of self-fashioning proposed by Stephen Greenblatt in Renaissance Self-Fashioning (1980). Greenblatt’s earlier work is not a treatise on disguise theory and yet it develops analyses which appear highly pertinent to the study of disguise in the early modern social and literary context. The author emphasises a vital significance of disguise within his interpretation of Renaissance culture, typified by, he argues, the preponderance of rhetoric and sustained theatricality. I will foreground my study by briefly outlining the key assumptions of New Historicism beliefs on literature, history and the construction of human identity. After that, I will introduce Greenblatt’s analyses on self-fashioning. Then, I will apply these analyses to Shakespeare’s Duke, showing how this ruler’s self-identity is governed by the forces of self-fashioning, resulting in a great psychological conflict. I will show how the Duke’s rhetorical submission to Christian doctrines conflicts with his personal motivation to disguise, resulting in an emergence of behaviours that constantly erupt into his own discourse while he operates within and outside of sartorial disguise.

The continuing relevance of New Historicism and its underlying principles

New Historicism has profoundly affected the relationship of literary theory to Shakespeare Studies, forever changing the historical receptiveness of Shakespearean scholars, as well as those engaged in other methodologies. Despite inducing heated criticism, this approach has nonetheless only served

---

6 This investigation is also outlined within the second chapter of my doctoral dissertation, “Incognitos: Shakespeare’s Uses of Disguise in the Light of New Historicism and Its Legacy.” Diss. University of Warsaw, 2021.

7 I outline the importance of this relationship in “‘How can you say to me I am a King?’: New Historicism and its (Re)interpretations of the Design of Kingly Figures in Shakespeare’s History Plays,” 2021, Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance, Vol. 23 (38): 147-148.

8 Lee Patterson, desiring a re-definition of New Historicism in Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Mediaeval Literature, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), ix, calls for a rejection of the assimilation of the historical into the textual (which I shall shortly explain). More recently, the Presentist movement have contended that any criticisms should not only consider a literary text’s past but equally refer to the critics’ present time in which the text is being scrutinised (see Terence Hawkes and Hugh Grady eds., Presentist Shakespeares, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006). Neema Parvini, in Shakespeare and New Historicist Theory,
to broaden our understanding of the complex nature of literature comprehended against its (new) historical background. Additionally, the elapsing of time has helped us better understand the historical positioning of New Historicism, for example, its debts to earlier approaches, doctrines and ideologies (especially Marxism) and its connections to more contemporary schools of thought, post-postmodernism and meta-modernism being two. As a result, seen from the viewpoint of the twenty-first century, New Historicism appears to be a consummately accomplished methodology, capable of defining its purposes, methods and results. This is the reason why a New Historicist contribution to contemporary understanding of a range of specific aspects of Shakespeare's output can be more greatly seen and more precisely evaluated.

While evaluating literary work, New Historicists emphasise the historical context that regulates the design of that work. Literature is only understood purely by virtue of the cultural and societal circumstances that facilitate writing, or as H. Aram Veeser contends, that “every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices.” New Historicists do not consider literature to be operating separately from history. As Louis Montrose notes, the two refer to each other: “the newer historical criticism is new in its unproblematised distinctions between ‘literature’ and ‘history.’” New Historicism also believes that human identity is constructed by the forces of society, culture and politics, while human nature is not considered as something which can somehow outstrip history. There cannot be a diachronic assessment between a person from the sixteenth century, for example, and ourselves as modern-day readers. Instead, New Historicists view history as a series of segments, a synchronic assessment between every age of humanity. Lastly, as Louis Montrose again contends, New Historicism is preoccupied with “the textuality of history,” where “we can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated...
by the surviving textual traces of the society in question.”^{14} A historian is therefore eternally positioned within their own ‘historicity’ while a present-day reader cannot conceivably enjoy a text in the same way as the text’s initial readers enjoyed it.

**Stephen Greenblatt and Disguise Theory**

It is within Greenblatt’s inherently theatrical concept of self-fashioning that we find a remarkably rich inspiration for the interpretation of Shakespeare’s Duke Vincentio, with regard to his masking strategy and to the psychological conditions which make his disguise desirable, sustained or abandoned.^{15} In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980), Greenblatt explores the acts of self-fashioning within literature, contending they are essentially triadic, occurring in relationship to the power structures of a given culture. In a culturally-determined dialectic between identification and rejection, the self takes shape from its submission to an authority at least partially outside the self and from rejection of “a demonic and alien Other.”^{16} To demonstrate this theory, Greenblatt looks at six representative figures — Sir Thomas More, William Tyndale, Thomas Wyatt, Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, and William Shakespeare - in order to show how their writing revealed some of the characteristic strategies for self-fashioning available in sixteenth-century culture. Greenblatt uses More for instance, to show how identity can be shaped by submission to the institutional power of the Catholic Church while also rejecting the "fantastic" claims of personal power and vision by the Reformers as well as the King.^{17} In Othello, Shakespeare creates a hero whose self is constructed by submission to social codes of sexual restraint and by the rejection of appetite associated with women.^{18} Notwithstanding the diversity of motivations and pressures, all these biographies reveal similar patterns of conscious self-creation in the early modern context.

---

^{14} Ibid. 20.

^{15} Greenblatt provides a later assessment of Duke Vincentio within the chapter “Absolute Limits,” *Shakespeare’s Freedom*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 1-17, although he does not apply his theory of self-fashioning to the character. Instead, the author foregrounds the early modern trials of royal identity, feudal values and the intensifying distrust towards the manipulative aspects of human relations, both at the psychological and social level. He believes Duke Vincentio possesses a moral ambiguity, refusing to outwardly support the Viennese city’s pre-existing laws against illicit sexual activities. It is the Duke, he adds, who leads us to Shakespeare’s own conception of the ethical ambiguity of power. Overall, Greenblatt contends, the central idea about the play is the Duke’s overall anxiety about his rule, causing him to retract from the gaze of his subjects.


^{17} Ibid. 11-73.

^{18} Ibid. 232-254.
Interspersed within these biographies, we can locate Greenblatt’s somewhat indirect preoccupation with disguise which can be understood from a prior examination of the “modes of behaviour,” meticulously anatomized to expose the early modern strategies of self-fashioning. These modes are characterized by those of rhetoric, nonsense, loss and improvisation. If all these modes serve to promote a certain version of the self, they also inevitably call for the opposite, for example, for hiding, masking, using camouflage and therefore ultimately disguising the competing identities. Disguising rhetoric is characterized using feigned language, borrowed discourses, dialect (or voices) and wordplay. Borrowing discourses creates a discursive influence on the inner and outward self, forcing each to behave differently and therefore employ disguise. In the case of wordplay, the awareness of shifts in the meaning of words could be seen as a powerful tool in the realm of disguise, providing a means of manipulation to fashion an outcome as someone may see fit. Greenblatt reminds us of More’s desire to employ a range of dialects in an aim to replace the texts of the Reformist church, committed to eliminating his own voice in the process. With the mode of nonsense, we witness the struggle of the self-fashioning subject to accommodate a public and private persona. Greenblatt cites the use of More’s character, Raphael Hythlodaeus in *Utopia*, which he claims reveals the tension between More’s private and public selves, resulting in the appearance of comedy and irony. In turn, this creates an illusion, a nonsensical construction of reality. It is this nonsensical construction which invariably enters and disrupts our discourse and helps to disguise our real, innermost feelings. Finally with the mode of loss and improvisation we witness the self-fashioning subject utilising a range of manipulating devices which derive from an ability to design and imagine its own fictional role and, consequently, to employ disguise. Shakespeare’s Iago is cited by Greenblatt as a key exemplar of this. Crucially from the interpretative point of view, these modes of behaviour are subject to what Greenblatt calls the modes of desire and fear within the self-fashioning subject. The mode of darkness disguises the inner-self which is in conflict with the outer-self trying to play its role in public, accepting religious authority and power. Secondly, the subject undergoes a radical concealment of identity where its desires are attached to the need to disguise, generating fear and anxiety that other disguises will soon appear and will need to be confronted. With the need to liberate those desires and fears, to emancipate yourself from your identity, from disguise itself, we see that this is still attached to the discourse

---

19 Ibid. 162-163.
20 Ibid. 104.
21 Ibid. 54.
22 Ibid. 227-228.
23 Ibid. 209.
24 Ibid. 58.
of the other that you seek to separate yourself from. Finally, there is the desire to plunge into the forbidden, taboo sphere where the subject radically seeks a reformation of the self. Therefore disguise, is linked to the quest of the self (and the self-fashioning subject) to achieve, in Greenblatt’s view, a mistaken belief in the attainment of self-knowledge or as he puts it, a ‘self-content.’

Lastly, the modes of desire and fear are both verbally and non-verbally expressed by the self-fashioning subject, becoming subversive as they “erupt” into discourse. There are implications, too, for disguise. This is because the mode of inwardness can disguise the potential release of the self’s frustrated desires and fears to erupt through language and subvert the discourse of court ideology, while the mode of aggression can be disguised by the cloak of passivity. In turn the mode of mockery can form part of a calculated recklessness, itself a disguise in seeking sexual and political survival. Additionally, the mode of hatred or loathing is something that masks the self-fashioneer’s desire to wish the opposite, to seek reunion from conflict, for example.

One effect of disguise that arises from within self-fashioning is Greenblatt’s belief on the relationship between the self with its own culture. This is a relationship often characterized, nonetheless, through an intense struggle where the self-fashioning subject seeks to live with the demands of self-fashioning. This imposes a considerable strain on the psychology of the self, imposed by “the renewal of existence through repetition of the self-constituting act.” Therefore the more rigorous the self-fashioning act and the act of disguising, the greater psychological pressure placed upon the self-fashioning subject to the point where “social identities seem as fixed and inflexible as granite; at times, they shimmer like a mirage.”

I will seek to illustrate this point further in my subsequent analysis of Duke Vincentio.

**Duke Vincentio in Measure for Measure: the great improviser and manipulator**

The beginning of the play finds the Duke assigning a commission, the governance of the city of Vienna, to Escalus.

**DUKE**

Of government the properties to unfold
Would seem in me to affect speech and discourse.

---

25 Ibid. 31.
26 Ibid. 128.
27 Ibid. 156.
28 Ibid. 139.
29 Ibid. 65.
30 Ibid.201.
31 Ibid.110.
As much as they praise Escalus and outline what appear to be his noble intentions, the Duke’s words nonetheless reveal his desire for self-fashioning – he knows clearly that governance is dependent on one of its modes of behaviour, rhetoric, and that borrowing discourses are essential to playing the role of one in power.

As Escalus’ appointment is finalized, the Duke reveals the underlying pressures of balancing personal and civic matters.

**DUKE** There is our commission, From which we would not have you warp.  

This allusion to “warping” recurs in the scenes that follow. As Cynthia Lewis argues, such recurrences seem to “describe licentiousness, but in themselves they may suggest both error and resilience.” Soon, the Duke utters “But I do bend my speech / To one that can part in him advertise” which Cynthia Lewis feels is “self-reflective.” The Duke is now already contemplating disguise, drawing towards the desire for darkness and its expressive need for inwardness as he feels the tensions being created by his public and private personas.

As the Duke concludes, “No more evasion,” we hear an ironic comment on himself as someone about to enter disguise. The Duke’s inner-turmoil soon reveals a hesitancy regarding the fulfilment of civil duties.

**DUKE** …Give me your hand: I’ll privily away. I love the people, But do not like to stage me to their eyes: Through it do well, I do not relish well

---

33 *Measure for Measure*, 1.1.13-14.  
35 *Measure for Measure*, 1.1.40-41.  
36 Lewis, 276.  
38 *Measure for Measure*, 1.1.50.  
Their loud applause and Aves vehement;
Nor do I think the man of safe discretion
That does affect it.\textsuperscript{40}

While a wavering commitment to civic life is evident, providing the reader/spectator with a plausible motive for this disguise, The Duke’s re-emergence in Act 1 Scene 3, sees him discussing with Friar Thomas an alternative reason. We are drawn to the nature of the imputation Friar Thomas might have made:

\textbf{DUKE} Why I desire thee
To give me secret harbour, hath a purpose
More grave and wrinkled than the aims and ends
Of burning youth.\textsuperscript{41}

There resides the possibility that the Duke’s absence is necessitated by a romantic motive, helping to subvert what Kevin Quarmby saw as the ‘comical-history’ convention of the disguised ruler.\textsuperscript{42} An image of a morally ambivalent Duke is emerging as we continue to simultaneously construct him as an evasive, “notoriously slippery”\textsuperscript{43} character.

The Duke then comments on his contempt for the vanity of secular life:

\textbf{DUKE} My holy sir, none better knows than you
How I have ever loved the life removed
And held in idle price to haunt assemblies
Where youth, and cost, and witless bravery keeps.\textsuperscript{44}

He has preferred to enjoy a life of seclusion, while there remains a temptation to draw an analogy between this desire for solitude and the need to enter the state of inwardness so essential to the self-fashioning subject.

The Duke (as I will shortly show) sees the benefits of surveillance within the Friar’s robes he is soon to adorn, but first, he outlines his reason for aspiring to that condition.

\textbf{DUKE} We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
The needful bits and curbs to headstrong jades,
Which for this nineteen years we have let slip;\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Measure for Measure}, 1.1.66-72.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid. 1.3.3-6.
\textsuperscript{42} Quarmby, 111.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Measure for Measure}, 1.3.7-10.
Such lines appear to confirm his rejection of sexual profligacy in Vienna. However, we are clearly reminded, in his wavering depiction of his image as a competent ruler, (there is also the reference to the Royal ‘we’ rather than ‘I’) of his failure to address this situation through existing statutes.

And so, we are to believe that the Duke, having appointed Angelo to enforce these laws, wishes to see (through disguise) these statutes effected once more. However, the power of secret surveillance enabled by this disguise arises suspicion that some manipulative will is at play, hinting at the improvisational mode of behaviour within the realm of self-fashioning. This is evidenced in the Duke’s desire to not only oversee the gradual obedience of his subjects, but also carefully watch and assess Angelo himself:

DUKE I have on Angelo imposed the office;  
Who may, in th’ ambush of my name, strike home, [...]  
And to behold his sway,  
I will, as ’twere a brother of your order,  
Visit both prince and people.47

Through beholding Angelo’s “sway” in controlling the reins of power, the Duke desires to find out “what our seemers be.”48 David Weiser points here to the Duke’s exploitation of “verbal and dramatic irony, incorporating in himself a vast (if not quite complete) range of the play’s ironic meanings.”49 So, we see the Duke employing the use of wordplay within his rhetorical mode which also becomes a key weapon within his self-fashioning subjects’ arsenal.

The Duke appears disguised as Friar Lodowick in Act 2, Scene 3 and his opening gambit is used to enforce that disguise.

45 Ibid. 1.3.20-22.
47 Measure for Measure, 1.3.40-45.
48 Ibid. 1.3.54.
DUKE  Hail to you Provost – so I think you are.⁵₀

Soon it appears that the Duke desires to play the role of a confessor and the tone of his instruction is certainly manipulative, reflecting his own submission to the words of Peter from the Bible as he wishes to visit those victims of his own laws in prison.

DUKE  I come to visit the afflicted spirits
Here in the prison.
[...] make me know
The nature of their crimes, that I may minister
To them accordingly.⁵¹

And so confronting Juliet in prison, the Duke appears to deliver a Christian discourse of confession and mercy.

DUKE  Repent you, fair one of the sin you carry?
[...] Love you the man that wrong’d you?⁵²

However, such a stringent focus on Christian doctrine begins to waver as the Duke comments:

DUKE  Then was your sin of heavier kind than his.⁵³

Suddenly, as Victoria Hayne notices, it is the seeming harshness of the Duke's admonition that is “virtually evaporated in the simultaneous and pointedly bawdy reference to both the heaviness of her pregnancy and the weight she bore to get it.”⁵⁴ The emergent strains of the desire for darkness reappear in the Duke’s discourse as he struggles again to contemplate the public and private persona within self-fashioning.

Act 3 Scene 1 sees the disguised Duke still within the prison walls – this time accompanying the Provost and Claudio. It is a scene that Cynthia Lewis believes marks a great “transition” for the Duke as he “learns as much from his subjects about life as he teaches Claudio about death” (1983, 282). Coupled with this transition, we realise that as well as a confessor, the Duke now wishes to play the role

⁵₀ Measure for Measure, 2.3.1.
⁵¹ Measure for Measure, 2.3.4-9.
⁵² Ibid. 2.3.19, 24.
⁵³ Measure for Measure, 2.3.28.
of a counsellor. The long speech that he delivers to Claudio echoes both a mix of Christian morality and Senecan stoicism:

DUKE Be absolute for death; either death or life
Shall thereby be the sweeter. Reason thus with life:
If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing
That none but fools would keep.

The Duke’s attempts at consolation initially seem to be successful as Claudio “seek[s] to die.” However, as Lewis notices, “[t]his sudden change, however, gradually gives way to Claudio’s renewed longing to live.” Therefore, we can feel that the Duke, an ineffective magistrate, is just as ineffective a counsellor, exposing his naivete through this treatment of Claudio.

Regardless of the Duke’s ability to effect roles we nonetheless see evidence of his penchant for wordplay within his rhetorical mode of behaviour. J.W. Lever is notes such an instance in:

DUKE ...and doth beg the alms
Of palsied eld.

Lever comments that this “conceit” is “a play on the homophone “alms-arms.” Palsied old age (“eld”) begs youth for arms: impecunious youth begs old age for alms.” Darryl Gless also spots the “scriptural wordplay” of the Duke on “life and death.”

DUKE ...What's yet in this
That bears the name of life? Yet in this life
Lie hid moe thousand deaths; yet death we fear,
That makes these odds all even.

The Duke’s adept use of language nonetheless reveals a return of his wavering psychological state, evidenced in the subsequent conversation with Isabella. Rather than continue to praise Angelo, he suddenly starts to utter the opposite:

---

56 Measure for Measure, 3.1.5-8.
57 Ibid. 3.1.42.
58 Lewis, 283.
59 Measure for Measure, 3.1.35-36.
60 Lever, 69.
62 Measure for Measure, 3.1.38-41.
DUKE The assault that Angelo hath made to you, fortune hath conveyed to my understanding; and, but that frailty hath examples for his falling, I should wonder at Angelo. How will you do to content this substitute, and to save your brother?\textsuperscript{63}

Darryl Gless believes that the Duke is behaving oddly here, and sees a contrivance on the Duke’s part in bringing out the villainy of Angelo.\textsuperscript{64} I believe that the Duke is acting perfectly within the realm of self-fashioning because he is using the crafting powers of his improvisational mode of behaviour (and of course his rhetorical modes) to manipulate firstly Claudio and now Isabella. At the same time, the Duke is also seeking to praise the virtues of Isabella:

DUKE The hand that hath made you fair hath made you good. The goodness that is cheap in beauty makes beauty brief in goodness; but grace, being the soul of your complexion, shall keep the body of it ever fair.\textsuperscript{65}

A more complex picture of the Duke emerges, bound by his moral ambiguity. On the surface, the Duke appears to be testing the limits of Isabella’s virtues, assessing whether she herself would make an ideal companion for the companionless Duke. However, he also seems to be testing the limits he has placed on himself, finding it hard to adhere to. Furthermore, he is examining whether it is fair to place his own subjects under such enormous strain. And so here, we are reminded of Friar Thomas’s suspicions that the Duke’s quest in disguise was something more deeply inspired than its claimed political and social aims.\textsuperscript{66}

While trying to restore the respectability of Mariana and potentially averting the prospect of the death of Claudio, the Duke proposes his famous ‘bed-trick.’\textsuperscript{67} Carolyn Brown contends that Shakespeare used this device to “enhance the subtextual reading of the Duke by suggesting that his ruler indulges...

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid. 3.1.183-187.
\textsuperscript{64} Gless, 225.
\textsuperscript{65} Measure for Measure, 3.1.179-183.
\textsuperscript{66} Paradoxically enough, the Duke’s acts remind me of King Lear: ‘As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, / They kill us for their sport (King Lear 4.1.38-39). Furthermore, there is evident the contemporary distrust towards comic conventions.
\textsuperscript{67} The bed trick is a plot device in traditional literature and folklore; it involves a substitution of one partner in the sex act with a third person (to put it in other words, "going to bed with someone whom you mistake for someone else"). In the standard and most common form of the bed trick, a man goes to a sexual assignation with a certain woman, and without his knowledge that woman's place is taken by a substitute.
voyeuristic tendencies.\textsuperscript{68} She also mistakenly contends The Duke shows no love interest in Isabella.\textsuperscript{69} On the contrary, he has been repressing and rejecting his expression of desire for her while performing his undisguised, public role. In private, in disguise, he now enjoys arranging and fantasising about such pleasures and it is partly this dichotomy within his self, his almost simultaneous need for rejection and then desire for sexual and romantic pleasure, which I believe contributes to the wavering of his public and private persona as well as the frequent eruption of such sexual repression into his discourse.

Act 3 Scene 2 concludes with the Duke’s raging soliloquy, attacking Angelo or the abuses of his role.

\begin{verbatim}
DUKE Two treble shame on Angelo, To weed my vice and let his grow! O, what may man within him hide, Though angel on the outward side?\textsuperscript{70}
\end{verbatim}

The lines are as much a rebuke towards himself, his own inability to effect a decisive model of governance. There is also recognition to the power of self-fashioning and its ability to manifest itself in disguise (‘O, what may man within him hide’), followed by a recognition to the desire of the self-fashioning subject, to be the ‘angel on the outward side,’ the paragon of behaviour seemingly unfettered by those scheming anxieties within.

Whatever doubts have arisen about his ability to perform his different roles within his disguise, both in his own mind and in the audience’s, the Duke remains committed to his plan to frame Angelo. In doing so he begins to show a cruel approach in the employment of the improvisational mode of behaviour. This is evidenced by his treatment of Isabella and instilling the belief in her that Claudio has already been executed. This enables the tide of opinion to further run against Angelo and importantly, to instil a virtuous and resolute response to death in Isabella, qualities that the Duke is looking for in a future partner. His treatment of her concludes:

\begin{verbatim}
DUKE Mark what I say, which you shall find By every syllable a faithful verity. The duke comes home tomorrow; - nay, dry your eyes.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Measure for Measure}, 3.2.262-265.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid. 4.3.125-127.
Isabella’s response must give the Duke great hope in his amorous quest and is testament to his manipulative powers of persuasion, finding a true converter to his faith.

**ISABELLA** I am directed by you.\(^72\)

The Duke’s reappearance in Act 5, a return to the eyes of his public, is seen to be in distinct contrast to his initial desire to “privily away.” What is equally striking is that having put down his friar’s robes, the Duke nonetheless has not refrained from the governance of self-fashioning, soon deciding to play another role, one that Cynthia Lewis describes as a “teacher.”\(^73\) His public mission while playing this role, is plausibly outlined in Stacy Magedanz’s words, “to unite public and private, and specifically to expose Angelo’s hypocrisy as a civil authority while eliciting Isabella’s personal sense of compassion.”\(^74\) In eliciting this sense of compassion, I will argue that this is to finally prove within himself the suitability of Isabella in marriage.

The Duke shows his manipulative skill, attempting to deny his own private misgivings about Angelo which we see expressed by the voice of Isabella:

**ISABELLA** That Angelo’s forsworn; is it not strange?
That Angelo’s a murderer; is ‘t not strange?
That Angelo is an adulterous thief,
An hypocrite, a virgin-violator;
Is it not strange and strange?

**DUKE** Nay, it is ten times strange!\(^75\)

What is apparent during Isabella’s intensifying interrogation is that The Duke’s fondness of playing a teacher is soon relinquished as he swiftly returns to a confessor’s role. Despite it being the undisguised version, we still witness our protagonist governed by the forces of self-fashioning. Showing apparent frustration with Isabella’s persistence in blackening the name of Angelo, the Duke concludes:

**DUKE** Someone hath set you on:
Confess the truth, and say by whose advice
Thou cam’st here to complain.\(^76\)

---

\(^72\) Ibid. 4.3.137.
\(^73\) Lewis, 286.
\(^75\) *Measure for Measure*, 5.1.39-44.
\(^76\) Ibid. 115-117.
And so, the Duke soon stages the moment when he can no longer tolerate Isabella’s presence, having her arrested. Just before she exits she reveals that it was Friar Lodowick that brought her to the scene. The Duke’s reply is telling for it reveals the deep influence of his self-fashioning while disguised and equally now, undisguised, as the play reaches its climax:

DEUCE A ghostly father, belike. – Who knows that Lodowick ?

The hold of self-fashioning remains very much within the Duke and when the veiled Mariana is brought forward for questioning, the manner of interrogation seems to mirror the desire of his inner-self in search of its own identity:

DEUCE What, are you married?
MARIANA No, my lord.
DEUCE Are you a maid?
MARIANA No, my lord.
DEUCE A widow, then?
MARIANA Neither, my lord.
DEUCE Why, you are nothing then: neither maid, widow, nor wife?

Mariana soon lifts the veil and tells of her plight. Here, the framing of Angelo should, we think, become apparent but the Duke agrees with Angelo that Isabella and Mariana were “instruments of some more mightier member / That sets them on.”

It is clear that the Duke wishes his alter ego, Friar Lodowick to return and finally provide the means to seal Angelo’s fate. It is a desire too, of the Duke to re-engage with his “life remov’d” that he so loves:

DEUCE There is another friar who set them on;
Let him be sent for.

Lucio’s sheer intolerance of Friar Lodowick leads him to reveal the Duke in disguise although there is little evidence of this ruler’s penchant for self-fashioning abating. The Duke’s first reaction serves as an ironic comment on his own behaviour, his own knavish antics behind the Friar’s robes contributing very much toward the self that this leader of Vienna has fashioned:

DEUCE Thou art the first knave that e’er madest a duke.
Lucio’s desire to see the Friar “hanged in an hour”82 suddenly turns table and fears his unmasking “May prove worse than hanging”83. The revealed Duke nonetheless continues his manipulative, improvisational self in the subsequent handling of Angelo. In sentencing him initially to death, the Duke wishes to bring about one of his own desires from disguise, winning the hand of Isabella. In achieving this aim, the Duke must engender the begging and forgiveness of Angelo, which the deputy accedes to. The result of this is the immediate insistence on the marriage of Angelo to Mariana. As David Thatcher rightly sees, the Duke’s pairing of these two in marriage leads us to conclude: “Is it cynical to suppose that Duke Vincentio, by marrying Angelo off to Mariana, eliminates a possible rival for Isabella’s hand?”84

After pardoning Claudio, the Duke reveals that one of his key ploys behind his disguising is indeed to win Isabella’s hand.

DUKE …and, for your lovely sake
Give me your hand and say you will be mine.85

It is not at all clear, though, whether Isabella will accept, and Shakespeare deliberately leaves us without this resolution answered.86 This open-endedness is also exemplified in the Duke’s arrangement of the marriage of Angelo and Mariana, as well as the insistent pairing of Lucio with a prostitute to save his life.

The Duke’s mode of rhetoric, characterized by his Christian forgiveness and newly found assurance in his former role, is soon to be contrasted by his final obligation to Isabella:

DUKE I have a motion much imports your good;
Whereto if you’ll a willing ear incline,
What's mine is yours and what is yours is mine.

82 Ibid. 5.1.353.
83 Ibid. 5.1.358.
85 Measure for Measure, 5.1.489-490.
86 Anthony Dawson comments that Isabella’s silent refusal to accept the Duke’s proposal is seen, like Angelo, in a failure “to write Isabella's destiny,” 337. He also refers to John Barton’s 1970 production of the play which “had Isabella turn away from the Duke's marriage proposal in confusion, [and so] he underlined an ambiguous silence that, like Lucio's wayward voice, helps to undo the elaborate structure of verbal and theatrical authority constructed by the Duke and his deputy (and of course by Shakespeare himself as well),” 337.
So, bring us to our palace; where we'll show
What's yet behind, that's meet you all should know.\(^\text{87}\)

The uncertainty of the play’s outcome, whether Isabella will indeed agree to play a significant role in the Duke’s future, is a measure of the uncertainties that rage within the Duke’s psychological state of mind. The continuing conflict, evident in his discourse, between Christianity and the seeming love of the “life removed” along with its manipulative and improvisatorial mode of behaviour leave the audience themselves perplexed and irresolute at the end of this play, themselves lacking the “self-knowledge” that such a climax should enable.

**Conclusion**

While it has often been the view of critics to see the Duke as an exemplification of a literary convention or a stock character, the application of Stephen Greenblatt’s insights on self-fashioning, I believe, puts more emphasis on the internal conflicts with the figure and therefore exposes the inconsistencies of his policies and behaviour rather than the coherence of his stage design. Such an interpretation shows him as a morally weak character (prone to subconscious desires and unable to rule) and at the same time, an expert manipulator trained in adopting diverse types of discourse to craft new personas. What is also important to notice, is that despite the friar’s robes, his mode of disguising is predominantly verbal. Lucio can (probably) see through his disguise whereas the women cannot. This is because the women did not know the Duke before and are utterly vulnerable in the oppressive circumstances they must face. Moreover, the Duke’s disguise can in fact be seen as sacrilegious as he claims the most intimate control over the women’s pious souls, converting secular power into spiritual control. With this in mind, we may be tempted to re-explore the parallel drawn out at the start of this paper. Subsequently, we could infer that the Duke’s desire to exercise this spiritual control is also Shakespeare’s own comment on the absolutist doctrines of James I himself.

**Bibliography**


\(^{87}\) *Measure for Measure*, 5.1.532-536.


